Canada’s Commercial Seal Hunt

An overview

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Overview

• Importance of seal hunt
• Description of sealing activity
  – Season, Location
  – Participants: Licence holders, Fleets, Processors
  – Sealing Methods
• Third Party Observers
• Role of Department of Fisheries and Oceans
• Summarize Key Qualities of Canadian Seal Hunt
• Challenges and Opportunities
Importance of seal hunt

• Socio-cultural importance
  – A way of life and a source of pride and cultural identity
  – Highly skilled activity with long tradition

• Economic importance
  – several Atlantic communities earn up to 35% of income from sealing
  – $70 – $100 / pelt = $30 CDN Million (2006)
  – $33 / pelt = $7 CDN Million (2008)
Season, Location

- Commercial harp seal hunt in March - April
- Front and Gulf, but specific location is variable
- Sealers from Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, and Maritime provinces
- Grey Seal hunting on Scotian Shelf and in Southern Gulf
Participants - Licence holders, Fleets, Processors

• Personal Use Licences
  – Six seals per season, non-commercial

• Temporary Licences
  – Crew only, not permitted to hunt

• 14,000 Commercial Licences
  – 5000 to 7000 active licences
  – Professional licences
  – Apprentice licences (supervised 2 years)
  – longliners (200-300), small boat operators (>1000), landsmen
Long liners

- Over 45’
- Longer trips
- Specialized crew (1-2 shooters, collectors)
- Often have small vessels as collectors
- Take 100s of seals / day
Small Boat fleet

- Under 45’, fibreglass or wood
- Shorter trips
- Few dozen seals per day
- Integral part of the hunt e.g., when the long liner fleets close, crews join the small boat fleet
Sealing Method

- Three step approach for stunning, checking and bleeding put in place in 2008
- Stunning via Rifle, Shotgun slug, Hakapik or Club
  - Specifications in the Marine Mammal Regulations
    (high powered rifle / ammunition, hakapic dimensions
    / weight, strike location, etc.)
- Checking via corneal reflex test
- Series of regulatory changes proposed for 2009
  - Implement veterinary recommendations and address
    concerns in European Reports
Third Party Observers

• Constitutional right to observe the hunt
• Observer licences granted each year
  – Minister ensures orderly management and protection of seals from disturbance
• 2008 was the most active year on record
• Unlicenced Observation
  – Sea Shepard Society and Farley Mowat
Role of Department of Fisheries and Oceans

• DFO provides advise, regulation, and safety at sea
  – Science, Policy, International, Fisheries Management, Oceans and Habitat Management, Legislative, Coast Guard
• Fisheries Management
  – Objective based fisheries management
  – Consultations
    • Expert working groups
    • Regional management planning sessions
    • Atlantic-wide Advisory Meetings
    • Seal Forum
  – Management measures
    • Total Allowable Catch, closed areas, opening / close dates, licence conditions
  – Enforcement
Enforcement

• At-sea inspections from large vessels, small boats and zodiacs;
• Aircraft overflights and on-ice inspections using helicopters;
• Dockside, plant and vessel inspections;
• Certified Fisheries Observers on sealing vessels;
• Daily vessel hails;
• Buyer/processor receipts;
• Vessel Monitoring System (satellite) for NL longliners.
Key Qualities of the Canadian Hunt

- Large-scale hunt
  - 100s of thousands of animals harvested annually
- Widely dispersed with 100s of vessels over huge geographical area
- Highly regulated and monitored
  - DFO Managers, Fishery Officers, Contracted Observers
- Highly scrutinized
  - NGOs, Journalists, Parliamentarians
- Comprehensively studied by marine scientists, veterinarians, Royal Commission, European Studies
Challenges and Opportunities

• Ensuring continued healthy status
• Implementing new management measures for humane killing
• Effective compliance strategy
• Obtaining derogation, or finding non-EU markets